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FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

VISITORS OF THE VIRGINIA INSTITUTION

FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE

DEAF AND DUMB AND OF THE BLIND.

OFFICE OF THE LITERARY FUND,
27TH JANUARY 1840.

SIR,

Herewith I transmit the first annual report of the visitors of the Virginia institution for the education of the deaf and dumb and of the blind, which you will please lay before the house of delegates.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

DAVID CAMPBELL,
President Literary Fund.

The honourable the Speaker of the House of Delegates.

RICHMOND, VA., JANUARY 25, 1840.

To the President and Directors of the Literary Fund.

GENTLEMEN,

I have the honour to transmit to you a copy of the first annual report of the visitors of the institution for the education of the deaf and dumb and of the blind. Having been requested to add any thing that I might regard as important, I have pleasure in saying that the report together with the copy of by-laws herewith transmitted will give full information on the whole subject.

With great respect, I am,

Your obedient servant,

WM. S. PLUMER.

To the honourable the General Assembly of Virginia.

The visitors of the Virginia institution for the education of the deaf and dumb and of the blind, in obedience to the requisitions of the law establishing the institution, beg leave to submit to your honourable body the following

REPORT.

In the month of April 1839, the president and directors of the literary fund appointed the reverend William S. Plumer of Richmond, James M'Dowell esq. of Rockbridge, Robert Gray esq. of Rockingham, and Alexander H. H. Stuart, Nicholas C. Kinney, Francis T. Stribling and James Points esquires of Staunton, visitors of the institution, and instructed them to assemble at Staunton on the 6th day of May 1839, for the purpose of making the necessary arrangements for its organization. In compliance with this instruction the five last named visitors convened at the time and place designated and organized themselves as a board by the appointment of a president, secretary, and treasurer. They proceeded also to take some preliminary steps to enable them at a future day to discharge in a satisfactory manner the duties confided to them. With this view they appointed a committee to prepare a system of by-laws for the government of the institution, and deputed Mr. Nicholas C. Kinney, one of their own body, to visit various institutions of a similar character in the northern states to examine into their system of instruction; to procure information as to the best plans for the buildings; to institute the necessary enquiries to enable the board to make a judicious selection of professors and teachers; and to gain such intelligence generally as would be useful in giving practical effect to the legislative will. As two of the visitors (Doctor Plumer and Mr. M'Dowell) in whose intelligence and judgment the board placed great confidence, and from whom they expected important aid in the organization of the schools, were prevented by other duties from attending the first meeting, it was deemed most proper to postpone any definitive action on other interesting subjects until a full attendance could be obtained; and the board with this view adjourned until the 2d day of July following.

On that day all the members of the board assembled; and reports were received from the committee appointed to prepare a system of by-laws, and also from Mr. Nicholas C. Kinney of the result of his visit to the northern institutions.

A number of the by-laws were then considered and adopted, a copy of which accompanies this report.

Another important subject which occupied the attention of the board was the selection of a site for the buildings of the institution. Several were suggested, and three valuable lots were tendered as donations to the board for the use of the institution. Each one of these locations possessed many recommendations, but on mature consideration of all the circumstances the board concluded by an unanimous vote to accept the lot tendered by Mr. James Bell of Augusta county. His donation embraced a lot of five acres of land situated about a quarter of a mile east of Staunton, on a beautiful eminence crowned by an extensive grove of forest trees. The board, however, subsequently considering that the quantity of land was too limited for the prospective wants of the institution, purchased an addition containing eleven acres and some poles for which they paid forty dollars per acre, a price below the intrinsic value of the land.

After the sites had been selected the visitors proceeded to consider the various propositions which were submitted for the execution of the buildings, and accepted that of Mr. William Donohoo of Albemarle, who proposed to do the brick work at $8 per thousand—the stone work at $2 50 per perch, and the carpenter's work at 40 per cent. less than the prices specified in the Richmond book of prices.

Several plans were suggested and considered, but none of them entirely satisfactory. The subject was referred to the executive committee, and that committee subsequently deemed it most expedient in every point of view, to employ Mr. Long of Baltimore, an architect of distinguished reputation, to visit the site selected and to prepare a complete plan, embracing the most minute details and specifying particularly the manner in which the work should be executed. He has in part discharged this duty, and from the general outline of the plan which has been furnished the board are persuaded that he has been extremely fortunate in blending entire convenience of arrangement with a high degree of architectural beauty. The board are now in daily expectation of receiving the drawings and detailed specifications of the buildings, duplicates of which will be laid before the general assembly. The cost of this plan, including Mr. Long's expenses in visiting Staunton, will not exceed $200 or $250, and the board are satisfied that a much larger sum will be saved in the cost of the buildings by the minute specification furnished by him, independently of the incalculable advantages which will result from having an edifice exactly adapted to its objects and in harmony in all its parts with the rules of architecture.

But little progress has yet been made in the work. The foundation has been excavated, a large number of brick have been made and a quantity of stone quarried, and the work will be commenced and vigorously prosecuted whenever the season is enough advanced to enable the workmen to operate efficiently.

Appointments were also made of two professors to take effect when the institution should go into operation. Harvey P. Peet, esq., principal of the New York institution for the deaf and dumb, was appointed principal of that department in the Virginia institution; and William Graham, esq., of the Philadelphia institution for the blind was appointed professor of music in the department of the blind.

Some differences of opinion existed amongst the visitors as to the intention of the legislature in relation to the time of opening the schools. Whilst all were satisfied of the propriety of commencing operations immediately, some members doubted the power of the board to open the schools until the buildings intended for the institution should be completed. The board under these circumstances being unwilling to incur the hazard of assuming an authority not delegated to them by the law, referred the decision of this question to the president and directors of the literary fund, communicating at the same time their sense of the propriety of opening the schools immediately, so as to have the officers of the institution assembled and a few pupils collected to constitute model classes upon which the schools might afterwards be formed. Various other considerations which it is unnecessary to mention in detail, concurred to recommend this course, and the president and directors of the literary fund, after consulting the attorney general, instructed the board of visitors that they were at liberty to put the institution into operation as soon as practicable. Upon receiving this information the board proceeded at once to take the necessary steps to open the school on the 15th of November. Harvey P. Peet, esq., having declined the appointment conferred on him by the board at their meeting in July, the office of principal in the department of the deaf and dumb was filled by the election of the Rev. Joseph Tyler of the Hartford institution for the deaf and dumb, who was recommended to the board as a gentleman possessed of fine talents, of an exemplary character, and of great experience in the duties of his department.

Doctor Morrillat of the Philadelphia institution for the blind, who was also strongly recommended to the board, was unanimously elected principal in that department.

Mr. William Graham of the Philadelphia institution, having signified his acceptance of the office of professor of music, the only office remaining to be filled was that of assistant teacher in the department of the deaf and dumb. For this office several gentlemen were recommended, but the board being of opinion that under all the circumstances the public interest would be best subserved by the appointment of Mr. Job Turner, he was unanimously elected.

The visitors cannot forbear to congratulate the legislature upon their good fortune in securing the services of the gentlemen above named, in their respective departments; and the visitors resident in Staunton, who have had an opportunity of becoming personally acquainted with them, take special pleasure in adding their testimony to the abundant evidence which was before the board from other quarters, to the exemplary deportment and high qualifications of the professors.

In the arrangement of the salaries of the professors the board have sought to be as economical as was consistent with the true interests of the institution. Their object has been to procure the services of the most competent persons for a reasonable consideration, avoiding extravagance on the one hand and niggardly parsimony on the other. Acting on these principles they have allowed the following salaries:

To the principal of the deaf and dumb department, - -	$ 1200
To the assistant teacher of deaf and dumb, - - -	250
To the principal of the blind department, - - -	600
To the professor of music, - - - -	300

Major George Eskridge of Augusta, a gentleman of unblemished character who has served his country for many years in a civil and military capacity, was appointed steward, and his wife, Mrs. Margaret Eskridge, a lady eminently qualified in every respect for her duties, was selected as matron. Their joint compensation is $ 500 per annum in addition to the boarding of their family.

Dr. Addison Waddell, a gentleman of talents and of great professional learning and experience, was appointed physician to the institution. The amount of his salary has not yet been ascertained, the board having deemed it most expedient, under the present temporary arrangements, to proportion it to the services rendered. With the view of opening the schools on the 15th of November, the visitors rented a house in the suburbs of Staunton for the use of the institution, and advertised that they would be ready to receive pupils on the 15th of November. It was soon found, however, that it would be impossible in a building so limited in its means of accommodation to preserve that classification and complete separation of the different classes and sexes of the pupils, which is enjoined by the terms of the law, as well as by the plainest dictates of propriety.

This difficulty compelled the board to suspend their invitation to pupils for a short time. They have within a few weeks past rented an additional building and made arrangements for the comfortable accommodation of a considerable number of pupils.

This building is appropriated to the blind and is under the superintendence of Mrs. Coleman, a widow lady, and her sister Miss Bragg, ladies of exemplary piety and virtue, who act in the character of governess, housekeeper, sempstress and assistant teacher of the females. Their joint compensation is $ 300 in addition to their boarding. Eighteen pupils have already applied for admission, five of whom have arrived and are now receiving instruction at the institution. The others have been detained, it is presumed, by the unexampled inclemency of the weather and the almost impassable condition of the road.

The same causes have detained a part of the furniture, books and apparatus designed for the use of the institution, and have subjected the professors to great inconvenience. It is hoped, however, that in a few weeks all those difficulties will vanish and the affairs of the institution assume an aspect which will be cheering to the heart of every individual who cherishes a feeling of compassion for the unfortunate objects for whose instruction the institution was founded.

The visitors take much pleasure in acknowledging the many evidences of a kind and friendly regard for the interests of the infant institution, which have been manifested by establishments of a kindred character to the north. The trustees of those institutions have taken occasion to exhibit their interest, not merely by tendering all the information in their power in relation to the organization of the schools, but they have also presented the Virginia institution with books, apparatus and specimens of their manufacture, which have been thankfully received and preserved by the visitors.

Another circumstance has afforded much gratification to the visitors. The Virginia institution has already begun to attract the notice of intelligent and humane persons in some of the states south of Virginia. Many enquiries have been made as to its progress, and a disposition has been expressed by different individuals to patronize it whenever the means of accommodation and facilities for instruction are made equal to those possessed by northern schools. From these indications the board think it more than probable that the institution under their charge will at an early day be extensively patronized by the southern people, as they are determined to use every exertion within the scope of their authority to render it worthy of a generous support.

A full report of the fiscal affairs of the institution has been forwarded to the president and directors of the literary fund, and can be seen by a reference to their files. From that report it will be seen that a large proportion of the annual appropriation has been expended in the outfit of the establishment, such as the purchase of books, maps, musical instruments and apparatus, &c., and of bedding and furniture of every description, as well for the steward's department as for the departments designated for the professors and pupils. These articles are of a permanent character and of course no such expenditure will be incurred in any subsequent year, except so far as may be necessary to supply an increased number of pupils. In making these purchases the board have thought it best to procure articles of a plain and neat style, but of good quality and such as will suit for the new buildings when completed. Much of the furniture has been purchased under the personal superintendence of one of the board resident in Richmond aided by several humane ladies, who kindly offered their services in this work of benevolence. The purchases have been made on good terms and the articles are in every respect satisfactory to all interested.

At a meeting of the board of visitors of the Virginia institution for the education of the deaf and dumb and of the blind at Staunton, January the 23d, 1840:

Alexander H. H. Stuart, esq., president of the board, presented to the board the first annual report, which was read, approved and adopted; and it was therefore

Resolved, That the secretary enclose said report to the Rev. William S. Plumer of Richmond, one of the visitors of this institution, with a request that he add any thing thereto he may deem proper, and lay the same before the president and directors of the Literary fund.

A copy—Teste,

NICH'S C. KINNEY, *Sec'y.*